

US Adriatic Charter Signing Ceremony (Powell joins Albanian, Croatian, Macedonian counterparts)

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell joined Albanian Foreign Minister Ilir Meta, Croatian Foreign Minister Tonino Picula, and Macedonian Foreign Minister Ilinka Mitreva May 2 in Tirana, Albania, to sign the U.S.-Adriatic Charter.

The Charter, Powell said, will serve as a roadmap to Euro-Atlantic integration for the three countries. He said it "reaffirms our partners' dedication to work individually with each other and with their neighbors to build a region of strong democracies powered by free market economies," and "underscores the importance we place on their eventual full integration into NATO and other European institutions."

Powell said the Charter also recognizes that hard work lies ahead for the partner countries "as they bring their economic, military and political institutions up to standards, not only those required by NATO, but more importantly those that the citizens of these countries deserve."

Powell said the Charter reaffirms pledges made by the three countries "to continue strengthening their democratic institutions, and to drain the swamp of corruption that stands between the region's peoples and their dreams. It requires them to raise up the rule of law, as a standard of fairness and dignity for all."

Following is a State Department transcript of the signing ceremony:

(begin transcript)

Remarks at the U.S.-Adriatic Charter Signing Ceremony

Secretary Colin L. Powell

With Albanian Foreign Minister Ilir Meta, Croatian Foreign Minister Tonino Picula, and Macedonian Foreign Minister Ilinka Mitreva

Tirana, Albania

May 2, 2003

MODERATOR: We have come here today for an historic event, that is the signing of the U.S.-Adriatic Charter. After the signing there will be statements by each of the ministers and the Secretary of State and if time permits there will be a short session of questions and answers. All the proceedings will be in English. Gentlemen, it is time to exchange the signatures. (Charter signed) The signing is over, please extend a warm applause. (applause)

I call on Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Albania, His Excellency Mr. Ilir Meta for his statement.

FOREIGN MINISTER META: Distinguished guests, dear Mr. Secretary Powell, dear friends Ilinka and Tonino.

It is a special honor that Secretary Powell chose to come to the region to sign this charter. It is not just our governments, but our peoples as well, who truly share a special bond with the people of the United States. We signed today the Charter of Partnership with my fellow colleagues from Croatia and Macedonia and the United States Government. We agreed to work together to bring our countries closer to NATO. The door for us is open and in this process we are not alone.

This is a strong message on our commitment to promote freedom, peace, stability, security and prosperity as fundamental values of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership. We are committed to work together with our international partners to face the challenges of the new millennium, such as terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, organized crime, and all sorts of illicit activities. We will continue to contribute in peacekeeping operations in and out of the Euro-Atlantic area. This will require hard work and tough

decisions, but Mr. Secretary, you have our commitment and strong resolve to show responsibility and leadership to continued stability and prosperity of our region.

I will conclude by expressing our gratitude to the Government of the United States and to the Secretary of State, Mr. Colin Powell, for the permanent support that the United States and Secretary Powell are giving to us. With your assistance, Mr. Secretary, we will all succeed. (applause)

MODERATOR: May I now call on Minister for Foreign Affairs of Croatia, His Excellency, Mr. Picula.

FOREIGN MINISTER PICULA: Thank you. Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends. I would like to thank, of course, Minister Meta, Albanian friends, for hosting this meeting. It's great to be in Tirana again. The signing to the U.S.-Adriatic Charter is an expression of our countries' commitment to the common values shared by all members of the NATO and to our continued cooperation. It is another step toward our countries' inclusion in European and transatlantic mainstream, and it is another step in building (inaudible) and security in our part of the world. I'm certain that the level of understanding we are expressing by signing this charter today will inspire other countries in the region as well, and that message of understanding and cooperation will contribute in its own way to closer dialogue with Southeast Europe, better. This dialogue is about (inaudible) open issues, about promoting closer economic and other ties, (inaudible) situation of each particular country in the region into the NATO and European Union.

Dear friends, I would particularly like to thank the Secretary of State, Colin Powell, for joining us today and thus expressing the U.S. support for the efforts that Croatia, Albania and Macedonia are putting in to create stability in Southeast Europe. The support of the United States is particularly valuable, since it comes from a country that has been for so many decades, and continues to be a vital factor in European security. Thank you. (applause)

MODERATOR: I now call upon Minister for Foreign Affairs of Macedonia, Her Excellency, Madame Mitreva for a statement.

FOREIGN MINISTER MITREVA: Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, colleagues. Today, Macedonia, Croatia and Albania concluded a charter of partnership with the United States of America. This is a document of vision that will guide us to the alliance where we belong, the transatlantic family of democracies. This is a document of values that affirms our common beliefs in democracy, rule of law, and human rights. Allow me to extend my deep appreciation, Secretary Powell, for being with us today. These are times that seek your utmost engagement and the will of your country. I would also like to thank our partners, the Albanian host, for their kind hospitality.

This charter builds another bridge over the Atlantic. This charter is a firm demonstration of partnership and commitment of our own countries. This charter builds enduring security in the Balkans. In the spirit of Vilnius, it is an addition of impetus for our common endeavor towards full membership in NATO in the next enlargement round. By signing this charter, the United States invests their authority and trusting us with their support towards our strategic integration.

President Bush has seen a community of European countries that stretches from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The Prague summit made one part of this vision true: we are here today to enrich this dream. We will bring with him that community of countries that extends from (inaudible).

There is a natural tendency of the democracy to ally with another in a collective effort to defend values they share. The idea of Europe, whole and free, does not allow any part of it to remain isolated. We recognize that joining in NATO and EU requires national decisions, national action, and national commitment for political, economic and military reforms. But we also recognize that many of the problems we face require regional cooperation, especially the fight against transnational criminal networks. Regional solidarity and regional coordination fit into global peace, security and prosperity.

We stand together with the United States and NATO to face bold threats of our times: international terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and militant (inaudible).

Dear friends, some problems we can solve by ourselves. Some, we cannot. But there are no problems we cannot solve together - we, Macedonia, Albania, Croatia and United States of America. Thank you. (applause)

MODERATOR: Thank you, all right, I call on the Secretary of State of the United States of America, His Excellency, Mr. Colin Powell, for a statement.

SECRETARY POWELL: Thank you very much. Minister Meta, Minister Mitreva, Minister Picula, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen. I am very pleased to be here in Tirana for the signing of the Adriatic Charter with Albania, Croatia and Macedonia. The very fact that we are here in Albania's capital city shows how far Albania and Southeast Europe have come over recent years. Once Albania was a watchword for isolation, a land and people cut off from the rest of Europe. Today we meet in a city that is opening to the world. Tirana is truly a fitting place from which to survey the road ahead. That road is the Euro-Atlantic road.

At last year's NATO Summit in Prague, President Bush reaffirmed the United States commitment to a strong relationship with a Europe that is whole, free and at peace and linked to the United States.

When pledging America's support for further expansion of NATO, President Bush made it clear that the Europe of his vision does not end at the Drava or the Danube, but embraces all the peoples of the Continent, including those of Southeast Europe. As the President stated, every European democracy that seeks NATO membership and is ready to share in NATO's responsibilities should be welcomed in our Alliance.

In this spirit, we warmly welcome the initiative launched with our partners here today to draft the Adriatic Charter. This Charter will serve as a roadmap for them and their path to Euro-Atlantic integration as well as a guide for our collective efforts to help them achieve their aspirations. The Charter reaffirms our partners' dedication to work individually with each other and with their neighbors to build a region of strong democracies powered by free market economies. It underscores the importance we place on their eventual full integration into NATO and other European institutions. And most importantly, the Charter promises to strengthen the ties that bind the peoples of the region to the United States, to one another and to a common future within the Euro-Atlantic family.

The Charter also recognizes that hard work lies ahead for our partner countries as they bring their economic, military and political institutions up to standards, not only those required by NATO, but more importantly those that the citizens of these countries deserve. The Charter reaffirms our partners' solid pledges to continue strengthening their democratic institutions, and to drain the swamp of corruption that stands between the region's peoples and their dreams. It requires them to raise up the rule of law, as a standard of fairness and dignity for all.

I am confident that the spirit of cooperation that created the Adriatic Charter will now speed our partners' reforms and the region's integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions. With my signature in the Charter today, I am confirming that the United States will do everything possible to assist the people of Albania, Croatia and Macedonia to reach their potential and together complete their historic journey back to the heart of Europe. Thank you very much. (applause)

MODERATOR: We are now in the questions and answers session. I emphasize all the proceedings will be held in English. Are there any questions? CNN, please.

QUESTION: The Adriatic Charter seems like a nice move toward world peace. But that said, we also understand today that India and Pakistan may have taken their first step toward normalizing relations and I was wondering if the Secretary had any comments on that.

SECRETARY POWELL: I am very pleased with the developments on the sub-continent over the last several weeks. The United States has been in very close touch with both sides. I've been in touch with my Indian colleagues as well as my Pakistani colleagues. And I think the reaching out that has taken place, first on the part of the Prime Minister Vajpayee a few weeks ago and the response from the Pakistani side and then that was followed up with a phone call between Prime Minister Jamali and Prime Minister Vajpayee, got the process moving along and now I understand there has been some additional openings with respect to air corridors and we are on the verge of seeing their representatives return to each other's capitals.

All this is very, very promising. At a time when people were beginning to wonder whether or not we were going back up on a slope of potential conflict, a conflict of the kind that we feared last year. So, I congratulate the leaders of both sides and I hope that these first steps are just that; first steps on the way to finding a way for the difficulties that existed between these two nations to be resolved through good will and through the solid conversation and dialogue.

MODERATOR: I recognize the representative of Macedonian A-1 TV.

QUESTION: Mr. Powell, a question for you, sir. Can Macedonia, Albania and Croatia hope for a bigger role in the reconstruction of Iraq?

SECRETARY POWELL: I'm sorry, I didn't hear that.

QUESTION: Can Macedonia, Albania and Croatia hope for a bigger role in the reconstruction of Iraq?

SECRETARY POWELL: Yes, we've spoken about that this morning with all of my colleagues. I think every nation should be examining their policies now to see how they can participate in the reconstruction of Iraq; reconstruction of Iraq not from what happened in recent weeks with the military conflict, but reconstruction of the society and the infrastructure of a society that was systematically destroyed by over two decades of dictatorship and bad leadership under Saddam Hussein.

What we are finding in Iraq now with the hospitals inadequate, water supply inadequate, roads inadequate, other things inadequate, the results of a dictator who spent the money of the people, the wealth of the country, its oil revenue on weapons of mass destruction and on threatening his neighbors. Now, the Iraqi people have new hope that they will be able to create a government that is democratic and that will serve the interests of its people.

And I think that the three nations here with me today have an opportunity to participate, not only in the reconstruction, but in showing the people of Iraq how to move forward out of the past and into the future. They have experience that is quite relevant and each and everyone of them has said to me that in one way or another, in other words, in the limited capacity that they have, that they are willing to help. Some have already helped by putting forces on the ground or making financial commitments or other types of commitments to the people of Iraq. And we're very pleased with their response, we're very pleased that they were supportive of our efforts from the very beginning.

MODERATOR: I recognize the representative of the Croatian television, HRT, Mr. Thomas.

QUESTION: I have a question for Mr. Secretary of State Colin Powell. Why did you choose Albania for signing the Adriatic Charter? Why not Macedonia or Croatia?

SECRETARY POWELL: Any one would have been fine by me, all three of them are partners in this together, and I regret I cannot be in three places in one time. They've all (inaudible). I look forward to visiting in their countries in the near future. But this was a convenient time and it was scheduled on relatively short notice. The Charter came together, and so I just took this opportunity on a planned trip to

come to Tirana, but I cannot think of a better place to do this, except the capitals of the other two that you mentioned. (laughter) We are not going to have a fight up here over this. (laughter)

What is important is that it wasn't a problem. Everybody was anxious to sign this Charter, to show partnership and in a partnership sometimes you are working in one country, and sometimes in another, sometimes it's in one capital, sometimes it's another. But there was no competition for this. It worked, it was convenient and we are all very pleased to be here today in Tirana.

MODERATOR: You, the Albanian TV 8.

QUESTION: Mr. Powell, why did you choose Tirana, was it for our position on war in Iraq? And for the other Ministers, I will just ask the same question: What do you mean?

SECRETARY POWELL: Well, clearly I took the opportunity of being here today to thank the President, Prime Minister and my Foreign Minister colleague for the strong support that Albania did provide to the coalition of the war on Iraq, and especially to thank them for the contribution with the troops -- a small contingent, but an important contingent that is working with our great 101st Airborne division in Iraq. And so that was certainly one additional reason, but it was more convenience for my schedule, as well as convenience on the part of my other two colleagues to join your Foreign Minister here today.

FOREIGN MINISTER META: and I want to have an additional answer with your permission Mr. Secretary to the Albanian journalist but also to the Croatian journalists and Macedonian journalists, that this Charter was having a very long travel until today. Skopje, Prague, Dubrovnik and our ambassadors in Washington etc. At the very beginning of my statement I said that it is a special honor that Secretary Powell chose to come to the region. I didn't mention Tirana because I hoped that everybody, even the Croatian journalists and the Macedonian journalists feel at home here as my colleagues Ilinka and Tonino are feeling.

MODERATOR: Last question, very short one today. 55.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary Powell, I will ask you that what is your opinion about the support of the United States in the war against organized crime, because it's not only a problem of Albania, but all the region and we have read all the last reports of the State Department on this issue.

SECRETARY POWELL: We have had a very candid discussion about the subject of crime and corruption and trafficking, and I think we are in agreement. It was here in my conversations with the Albanian leadership that this requires the efforts of all of us. You can't just fight it alone. You have to fight it as part of the regional cooperation and international cooperation. Terrorists, traffickers, those who deal in drugs, cross boundaries and destroy societies, both here and in far away as well. And so this is something the entire international community must come together on and the point I was making earlier here today, was that all of the nations in Southeast Europe have to be part of this campaign against this kind of activity.

And you're not doing it just to satisfy American interests or European interests, you're doing it for yourself, you're doing it to help your own people realize that as a society that wants to be part of a greater Euro-Atlantic partnership, you have to meet the standards expected of that partnership. And you want your country to be free of these kinds of influences; you don't want the world to look at your country and see these elements having sway, having power in your country.

So you are doing it for yourselves, and especially if you want to attract investment in your country. You want people to feel free to come here and invest and through that investment create jobs for your citizens. That's what it's all about. Investment is not just for a company to come in and making a profit, it's for a company to come in and trust your country and trust your people so that jobs can be created, wealth can be created for the people of Southeast Europe. And so they can provide better lives for their children and

that's what it's all about, not just ending crime for the sake of ending crime. Ending crime for the sake of building a better society that gives hope to the children of your societies. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister, distinguished Foreign Ministers, honorable guests. We were all very much honored by the visit of Secretary of State. We thank him very much for that. Now I thank you all for participating in the ceremony. Thank you very much for coming. (applause)

(end transcript)